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Corps' final Lower Snake River report cites survival, flexibility and economics as issues in preferred alternative selection

Walla Walla, Wash. - The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers final report on improving salmon passage through the lower Snake River dams is now available on the Corps' website.

The feasibility report and environmental impact statement provides the supporting documentation on the Corps' selection of major systems improvements as the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative is now known as the adaptive migration alternative.

"Key factors in selecting the alternative include high juvenile and adult salmon survival rates through the lower Snake River dams, flexibility in optimizing survival in changing river conditions, the uncertainty in current biological information on the effects of alternatives, minimal economic impacts and compatibility with the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services 2000 Biological Opinions on operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System," said Lonnie Mettler, Walla Walla District project manager for the feasibility study.

"Adapting the dams with various operational and structural configuration changes for improving fish passage better describes this alternative than simply calling it major system improvements," said Mettler. "The survival of both juvenile and adult salmon passing through the lower Snake River hydrosystem is already high for a majority of flow years and salmon stocks."

Operational changes proposed include improving the coordination and implementation of spill, flow augmentation and juvenile fish transportation.

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Structural changes include both near and long term improvements. In the near term, the Corps is proposing spillway improvements, upgraded adult fish passage systems, upgraded juvenile fish facilities and additional fish transportation barges. Proposed long-term improvements include turbine upgrades, removable spillway weirs and surface bypass structures.

The estimated cost of implementing the proposed structural improvements and changes in operations is \$390 million dollars over a period of 10 years.

The purpose of the feasibility study, began in 1995, was to examine ways of improving salmon passage through the four lower Snake River dams and reservoirs – Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite. The dams and locks cost \$36.5 million dollars to maintain annually. This includes the maintenance of fish facilities and the fish transportation program. The annual value of power, transportation and water supply provided by the lower Snake River dams is \$324 million.

Four alternatives were identified and thoroughly explored within the study -- existing condition, maximum transport of juvenile salmon, major systems improvements (adaptive migration), and dam breaching.

The Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Reclamation, and Environmental Protection Agency were cooperating agencies in developing the report. Other federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, provided essential input. The report was also reviewed by the member organizations of the Federal Caucus, which developed the "Conservation of Columbia Basin Fish," a basinwide salmon recovery strategy. Members of the Federal Caucus include the Corps, the National Marine Fisheries Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Park Service.

The Corps plans to prepare and sign a record of decision later this year.

For more information on the Corps' Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study visit <http://www.nww.usace.army.mil/lsr>.